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JUST BEING A WOMAN

The question of women in ministry is not a simple one, nor one I can avoid any longer as I tell my own story. My first impulse has been to ignore this complex issue and write as the majority of ministers would write, that is, as a man would write. One finds no explanations, no justifications, no apologies for “being mere men” in the ministry. However, for many years I have done what some say is a “man’s job only”. In some cases they mean, “It’s a man’s job, so get out of the pulpit!” In others, they are attempting a compliment, as in “You preach like a man.” Just as, in another context, they might say “You drive real good, just like a man.”

It is no secret that women have had to struggle for recognition of their full personhood; what is surprising is that the church with all its respectability is in so many areas the last bastion for male chauvinism.

On October 18, 1929, Mrs. Emily Murphy, 61, of Edmonton, was declared by the Privy Council of the House of Lords in London to be . . . a person. The magnitude of that event must be appreciated within the framework of Emily’s time. This was no mere legal quibble. Until our present century, women in Canada had few opportunities to enter any of the professions except teaching. They could not vote, sit on a jury, hold public office, choose their domicile or citizenship or be treated equally under the law. The prevailing attitude was summed up by the Premier of Manitoba who said in 1914, “When I come home at night, I don’t want a hyena in petticoats talking poli-

tics, but a sweet gentle creature to bring me slippers.”

It was Emily Murphy who initiated an appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada for a ruling on the interpretation of the word “person” as it appeared in the British North America Act which was, at that time, our Constitution. Five Alberta women signed a very simple petition to the Supreme Court of Canada asking, “Does the word ‘person’ in Section 24 of the BNA Act include female persons?”

After a long wait, these women — and indeed all of Canada — received word that women (along with criminals and idiots) were not legal persons within the terms of the BNA Act and therefore not eligible to sit in the Senate.

Canadian women were deeply disappointed in the ruling. The Honourable Mary Ellen Smith, the Liberal MLA for Nanaimo who became the first woman member of cabinet in the British Empire, wrote to Emily Murphy from BC. “The iron dropped into the souls of women in Canada when we heard that it took a man to decree that his mother was not a person.”

The Alberta Five appealed the decision to the Privy Council of the House of Lords in England, which at that time was Canada’s final court of appeal. The proceedings in London took four days and once again judgment was reserved. Days grew into weeks, weeks dragged into months. Finally, on October 18, 1929, before a crowded court, the Lord Chancellor of Great Britain, Lord Sankey, delivered the decision. Although women were still not admitted in their own right to the House of Lords, their lordships had generously determined that women were indeed persons, adding, “...and to those who ask why the word should include females, the obvious answer is, why should it not?”¹

In 1973 a Canadian stamp of 8¢ value was issued in belated tribute to Nellie McClung who had stumped across the Canadian prairies at the turn of the century securing the vote for women; she was also one of the Alberta Five. She applied her insights and intuitions regarding women in the secular and public arena, but the foundation of her thought was Christian. “The time will come ... when women will be economically free, and mentally and spiritually independent,” foretold Nellie. A McClung quote that came directly out of her church

life is, "Women may lift the mortgages, or build churches, or any other light work, but the real heavy work of church, such as moving resolutions in the general conferences ... must be done by strong, hardy men."²

Please understand me, I am not belligerent on this subject. I am bored, bored as a black person is bored with discussing what's wrong with apartheid. Nevertheless, for friend and foe, I force myself to collect my thoughts, and share how I, as a woman, pastored the same church for twenty-one beautiful years, preached twice on Sundays and midweek, ministered the communion, baptized believers, performed wedding ceremonies, counseled the living, buried the dead, acted as chairman of the board and chief administrative officer, and then, with a peaceful heart, chose to shift gears and go full time into writing and radio and television ministry.

For those who have conscientious objections to a woman's leadership in a church, such as Elizabeth Elliot, I have no bad feelings. When a fellow pastor said, "I am booking Elizabeth Elliot's schedule; would you like to have her for your televised Sunday evening service?" I was immediately enthusiastic. What a blessing her visit would be to our people!

Then came her letter saying that she was willing to come if I was willing to have her as a guest speaker despite the fact that she did not believe in women pastors. She would come only on the condition that we put a man in charge of the service that evening. "Certainly. No problem. Of course!" was my first internal response. Then the absurdity of it hit me. This rearrangement of the hierarchy was for one night only, presumably to make our guest feel comfortable because now, God was presumably pleased with the way we were doing things. But the Holy Spirit, who really *is* in charge, knows all things, including who is who and why. Not only was I in charge of the television service, I was the only one in sight who had the know-how for the production. Regrettably, we lost the benefit of Elizabeth Elliot's excellent ministry.

The fact that Elizabeth Elliot was willing to come at all at the invitation of a woman pastor indicates to me her good spirit, for these questions of ministry *are* legitimately matters of conscience. As one of Canada's leading pastors said on a conference floor in St. John's,

when the ordination of women was being discussed, "If women insist on being pastors, it is on their conscience." But the message conveyed by this influential male pastor sounded as though for a woman to preach and minister the gospel as one called by God is the equivalent of her stealing or living promiscuously. In his view, she ought to have trouble with her conscience, because she is going against God's will.

I have no time for debate with those who raise the subject of womens' ministries with the intent to silence or harass women. There is a lot of meanness in people that finds ready expression in targeting persecuted minorities. Let *them* follow *their* conscience. Like Nehemiah of old, my reply to their attack is, "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop, while I leave it and go down to you?" (Nehemiah 6: 3 NIV) "Four times," says Nehemiah, "they sent me the same message and each time I gave them the same answer." (v 4) As for me in Vancouver, exposed to public opinion through thousands of callers on television and open line radio, I have been endlessly challenged, questioned, cajoled, condemned, and alternately complimented and commended. Among those who think we women pastors should explain why we feel no guilt over serving God in pulpit ministry are all too many who see themselves as good Christians. One pastor in my own denomination, which is generally open to women's ministries and even to women's ordination, said to me in surprise, "You are not chairman of the board, are you?" He had, in a moment of folly, silenced the women of his congregation, on the grounds that in the spontaneous utterances of prophecy which came from the general congregation, more men should be heard from. Maybe so, but what has that to do with the role of women in the church family and why must their gifts be suppressed? As to the chairing of board meetings, if being a pastor is a labor of love and servanthood, there is nothing in servanthood that cannot be allowed to a woman. Most good pastors, men and women, serve, and lead by consensus of the mature leaders in the team.

Some encountered our ministry and were changed. A Christian leader who lived next door to a recently bereaved couple had an experience with them and me which caused him to modify his position

on women pastors considerably. In sorrow, Joan and Norman, who had lost their beloved small son through cancer, would go out for a drive on a Sunday night and listen to me on radio CJOR. The first time I saw them was when they came down the aisle of the church hand in hand to give their lives to God. Their late night listening had brought them both to a decision. "We need the kind of faith Bernice has."

Next day they jubilantly told their neighbor about their newfound faith, expecting him, a church leader, to be as happy as they were, especially since he had sometimes invited them to attend his evangelical church. Happy he was not. "Aren't you glad we made the decision?" they asked with the innocence of newborn babes. "Well, er . . . yes, but it's a shame you had to do it there! The church has women pastors," said he with a gloomy countenance.

Joan and Norman reported to us later that their neighbor's response upset them terribly, almost to the point of causing them to turn away from their earlier decision. It was all too confusing. In bed at night they tossed and turned, struggling for the correct answer. Was God really against women teaching and preaching? Both of them prayed, "Oh God, we need help!" "Then," said Joan "a Scripture came just like a little telegram from somewhere in the air. She knew hardly any Bible verses, so this was special. "It shall come to pass in the last days," says God, "I will pour out my Spirit and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." (Joel 2:28) With Scripture came a question, "Who has been the greatest help to you as, in your grief, you have been seeking after the Lord?" "Kathryn Kuhlman and Bernice Gerard," came the answer, immediately and clearly. As Norman and Joan discussed the matter they both had peace. Later their neighbor stood in the entrance to our new building and said, "I have always thought women ought not to take leadership, but when I see the soul-winning that goes on here, I say to myself, 'Who am I to judge?' To you I say, God bless you. I'm sorry I was negative with Joan and Norman."

My experience as a pastor has been good. Despite the negative examples just presented, my co-worker Velma Chapman and I enjoyed the best possible relationships with our congregation, men and women, boys and girls. The truth is, people forget that the minister is

a woman! “Do you find it tough having to relate to a ‘skirt’ in the pulpit?” asked a visiting preacher of one of our none-too-spiritual young married men, “It must be hard to have a woman for a pastor.” To which our young man responded, “Oh? I hadn’t noticed.” In Egypt, as guest speakers, we women were ushered to the platform, out of the women’s section, *and* out of the men’s section, into what we called jokingly “no man’s land.” But we were given the liberty of the pulpit to proclaim the Word and glorify God. Spiritually speaking, when in the place of worship we all relate to God and one another in the Holy Spirit, male or female is not an issue. Humanly speaking people naturally will have their preferences. How many times have I heard the remark, “He (or she) doesn’t *like* women preachers,” to which I respond, “So what’s new? Many people do not like any kind of preacher!”

In this brief account of what is presently foundational in my own understanding, I simply share what I believe to be true, and find liberating to me as a person. Liberation for a Christian woman is not a movement or an organization but “a state of mind in which a woman comes to view herself as Jesus Christ sees her — as a person created in God’s image whom he wants to make free to be whole, to grow, to learn, to utilize fully the talents and gifts God has given her as a unique individual.”³ My own thinking has been influenced by authors both secular and Christian; I would urge the reader who is interested in studying these issues to check out my footnotes for recommended reading.

Who Said Women Can’t Teach, recently authored by Charles Trombley, hits the hard questions square on, and, I believe, will be immeasurably helpful to women who feel a call to service but are concerned to do it God’s way. Charles was in the beginning stages of his book about women when he chose to minister on the subject at our church. I was not annoyed but was faintly uncomfortable since it put me and the congregation in a fish bowl. It was as if a white person had gone into an all-black church and said assuringly, “It is okay to be black, don’t worry.” On the other hand, I knew we needed men to speak up in favor of women ministers. Heaven knows, enough of them have written to silence women. Charles has written in my copy, “Here is the book for which you gave me a trophy,” recalling that I’d

promised him some kind of an award if he wrote it. He deserves our everlasting gratitude because, however much I may want to ignore the subject, it will not go away.

It is a blight on our Christian testimony worldwide that women are obliged to defend themselves for being women. Even at Christ for the Nations in Dallas, a school with seventeen hundred students and a world outreach that puts most groups of similar size to shame, students kept asking me "Do women have a right to lead and preach? I'm not used to hearing women really *preach* like you do." They certainly did not get their bias from observing the ministry of Freda Lindsay, the gifted administrator, teacher, leader and co-founder with her husband of the CFNI Ministries. My question is, "From where does all this junk about women come? Who supplies the disinformation and the emotional bias?" It is a deep spiritual question which has its origin in the Garden of Eden.

The ministry of women is the same ministry as engages the energy, gifts and life commitment of men. As Catherine Booth of the Salvation Army said, "Why should a woman be confined exclusively to the kitchen and distaff [a staff on which flax or wool is wound for use in spinning], any more than a man to the field and workshop? Did not God, and has not nature assigned to man his sphere of labor to till the ground and dress it? And if exemption is claimed from this kind of toil for a portion of the male sex, on the ground of their possessing ability for intellectual and moral pursuits, we must be allowed to claim the same privilege for women."⁴

In studying Genesis, I have observed that the Lord God did not plan for men and women to be in conflict or competition, but instead to be partners both in family life and doing God's will on earth. The subordination of women described in Genesis 3: 15-16 is clearly the result of sin. The Lord God curses the serpent and the ground, and predicts enmity unlimited between Satan and the woman. The degradation of women observable today in our so-called enlightened world, is ample proof that women are still in a special way Satan's target, with the intent to destroy the human family. Women sold into prostitution in India, Thailand, Hong Kong, Canada and the United States; a multi-billion-dollar trade in pornography, printed and video, in which women chiefly are the objects of sadistic or humiliat-

ing practices; these and more are evidence in our time that putting women down is a notable aspect of Satan's present task. Crudely, people joke, "Women are okay in their place. Barefoot, pregnant and at the kitchen sink!"

The modern thrust for women to think well of themselves is not in itself ungodly. Some go to ungodly extremes as in the pitting of the rights of the woman to have control of her own body over against the very life of the innocent unborn child. But the Edenic vision for woman is sublime indeed. Trombley in his chapter "Male and Female Made He Them" puts woman in God's intended context: "God made woman, not for man to rule, control, or make decisions for, but to be an equal partner who would rule with him and care for the garden with him. Who gave the orders? Who made the decisions? God! (Genesis 1:26,28; 2:15). Sin had not yet corrupted mankind; strife, aggressiveness, domineering attitudes, and the struggle for preeminence were unknown. Mankind bore the image and likeness of God himself. They acted like God, talked like God, and accepted each other as God. Paul said in I Corinthians 13:5: 'love does not seek its own.' Where there's the God-kind of love, there isn't any desire to take charge of another person. Whenever I hear 'Who is in charge?' I hear the voice of sinful man striving for dominance."⁵

When the Lord God spelled out to Satan, Eve and Adam the dire consequences of rebellion, Eve heard him say "In sorrow you shall bring forth children; and your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." (Gen. 3: 16 NIV) Ever since the Fall, some have assumed that the Lord himself is pleased when women are oppressed, and think when they see women in subjection, "Good! That is the way it must be." Their interpretation is a grief to women and a discredit to God Almighty. As I see it, and as Trombley sees it, "Rather than God's 'cursing' them, He warned them prophetically, telling them how it would be. He knew Adam's fallen nature would make him a tyrant. He knew he would abuse and use the woman, eventually reducing her to the position of common property. It wasn't God's desire; it was the terrible result of sin. Not a curse, but a consequence.

Had the imperative form been used, the meaning would be a direct

command and man would have to dominate the woman in order to fulfill the command. The more carnal and violent the man, the more perfectly he would fulfill this order, but thank God that wasn't the situation at all. The verb is in the simple imperfect form, warning them what would happen. Did God curse the woman? Absolutely not. Did he curse the man? Absolutely not.⁶

To the man the Lord God said, "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you. . . . By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground . . . for dust you are, and to dust you will return." (Genesis 3: 17-19 NIV) The history of the human family reveals that men have fought to put down thorns and thistles, have employed every possible means to perspire as little as possible, and with all that is in them, fought to delay the day of death.

The true reversal of the consequences of the Fall is brought to us by Jesus Christ. "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man." (1 Cor. 15: 21 NIV) "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3: 2 NIV).

One's appreciation of that gift of God, equality of personhood with every other member of the human family, is heightened by Scriptures that present great redemptive themes. The price of redemption is exactly the same for every man, woman, boy or girl regardless of color or creed. Each of us is redeemed "not with corruptible things like silver or gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot . . ." (1 Peter 1: 18, 19). The redeeming power of Christ makes it possible to go back to the ideals of Paradise. He came to make the crooked straight.

During my time in chaplaincy at Simon Fraser University and the University of British Columbia, women's issues were in the foreground of discussion. Students who came to campus from stable Christian families were drawn into conflict over the churches' historic record on women's rights, and whether women today can expect fair and equal treatment from the established church.

At the time my own interests led me to the works of radical secular

feminists, as well as those of Bible-believing evangelical scholars, male and female. To them and to the students whose sincere questioning demanded on behalf of the church an answer that represents Jesus more adequately than in the past, I owe the development of many insights.

I believe that Christian women everywhere should burst into a litany of praise, because Jesus promoted the dignity and equality of women in a male-dominated society. Every Christian woman should see herself as a liberated woman, set free by a Man nearly two thousand years ago. "Jesus was in favour of, and promoted the equality of women with men. He advocated and practised treating women primarily as human persons (as men are so treated) and was willing to contravene social custom to be true to the principle of equality of personhood."⁷

The status of women in Palestine during the time of Jesus was very decidedly inferior. Despite the fact that heroines of faith were recorded in the Scriptures, according to most rabbinic customs of Jesus' time — and long after — women were not allowed to study the Scriptures (Torah). One first-century rabbi, Eliezer, put the point sharply: "Rather should the words of Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman. . . . Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her lasciviousness."⁸

In the vital area of prayer, women were so little thought of as not to be given obligations of the same seriousness as men. For example, women, along with children and slaves, were not obliged to recite the Shema, the morning prayer, nor pray at meals. In fact the Talmud states, "Let a curse come upon the man who (must needs have) his wife or children say grace for him." Moreover in the daily prayers of Jews there was a threefold thanksgiving: "Praised be God that he has not created me a Gentile; praised be God that he has not created me a woman; praised be God that he has not created me an ignorant man."

In the great temple at Jerusalem women were limited to one outer portion, the women's court, which was five steps below the court for men. In the synagogues the women were separated from men. In public life, as well as religious life, women suffered greatly from discrimination. A rabbi regarded it as beneath his dignity to speak to a

woman in public; except in rare instances women were not accepted as valid witnesses in a court of law. In marriage, the role of women was seen exclusively in terms of child-bearing and child-rearing. Divorces were easily obtainable by men. Women in Palestine, on the other hand, were not allowed to divorce their husbands. In short, the status of women was exceedingly low. They were inferior, unequal and completely subordinate. Into such a society came Jesus.

Jesus taught women the gospel, the meaning of the Scriptures and religious truths in general. He talked to women in public. The Samaritan woman at the well said to him, "How is it that you being a Jew, ask a drink of me, who am a woman of Samaria? For Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." (John 4:9) The disciples, on returning, ignore the fact that Jesus was speaking to a Samaritan and emphasize the fact that he was speaking to a woman, as John reports. "His disciples returned and were surprised to find him speaking to a woman though none of them asked, 'What do you want from her?' or, 'Why are you talking to her?'" (John 4: 27) The overwhelmingly negative attitude of the rabbis toward women is entirely missing in Jesus. He and the woman discussed the most profound spiritual truths. To her Jesus said, "God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4: 24) Finally, he revealed himself as Messiah, and received ready acceptance from the woman.

Women who became disciples of Jesus not only learned from him ("learner" was the original meaning of the word), but also went with Him in His travels and ministered to Him. In Luke 8: 1-3, several married and unmarried women are mentioned along with the Twelve: "After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means." (NIV) There was also a considerable number of women who walked with Jesus all the way to Calvary's mountain. Mark 15: 40, 41: "Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene,

Mary, the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him, and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.” (NIV)

Jesus quite deliberately broke with another custom. It could not have been anything but deliberate that Jesus’ first appearance after his resurrection was to a woman who was then commissioned by him to bear witness to the good news of the risen Jesus to the eleven (John 20: 11 ff; Matt. 28:9 ff; Mark 16: 9 ff) In typical male Palestinian style, the eleven refused to believe the woman, since according to Judaic law, women and children were not considered competent to bear witness.

Another example which highlights the good news of the gospel is that of the love and understanding Jesus showed toward the woman of ill repute at the Pharisee’s house. When she began washing Jesus’ feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, and even kissing his feet as she anointed them with precious ointment, the skeptical Pharisee saw her as an evil sexual creature. (Luke 7: 36 ff) “The Pharisee ... said to himself, If this man were a prophet, he would know who this woman is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” Jesus deliberately refused to view the woman as a sex object; instead he rebuked the Pharisee and ministered to her as a person. Jesus then addressed her, even though it was not proper to speak to women in public, especially women of poor reputation: “Your sins are forgiven. ... Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (v 50)

Similarly moving is the account of the woman who had a hemorrhage of blood for twelve years because it touches on the taboos that have made life difficult for women. (Matt. 9: 20) In her reluctance to come to public attention, she said to herself, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” Mark records “Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.” (5: 29, 30 NIV) Wonderful! But why did Jesus, knowing immediately in himself that power had gone out of him, turn to the crowd and say “Who touched me?” Her shyness was not because she came from the poor, lower classes, for Mark pointed out that over twelve years she had been to many physicians and ended up with no healing and no money. It was probably because for twelve years, as a

woman with a flow of blood, she was constantly ritually unclean. (Luke 15: 19 ff). This not only made her incapable of participating in any temple worship, it made her in some way "displeasing to God," and rendered anyone and anything she touched (or anyone who touched what she touched!) similarly unclean. The sense of degradation and contagion that her "womanly weakness" worked upon her over the twelve years was no doubt oppressive. It seems clear that Jesus wanted to call attention to the fact that He did not shrink from ritual uncleanness incurred by the touch of the "unclean" woman. On several occasions Jesus rejected ritual uncleanness, and by immediate implication, rejected the idea of the "uncleanness" of a woman who had a flow of blood, menstuous or continual. Dramatically, and mercifully for women, Jesus altogether rejected the blood taboo, another of the traditional teachings that bound women.

Neither did Jesus limit woman's role to housekeeping. Jesus quite directly rejected the stereotype that the only proper place for women is in the home, during a visit to the house of Mary and Martha. (Luke 10: 38 ff) Martha took the typical woman's role, and was distracted with much serving. Mary took the supposedly "male" role and sat at the Lord's feet, listening to his teaching. Understandably, Martha apparently thought Mary out of place in abandoning the kitchen and choosing the role of "scholar and intellectual," for she complained to Jesus. Again, Jesus' response enriches our view of the good news of the gospel, especially for women. He treated Mary first of all as a person (whose highest faculty is the intellect, the spirit) who was allowed to choose her own priorities, and in this instance had "chosen the better part." She received Jesus' approval, and support: "It is not to be taken from her."

One cannot infer from Jesus' behavior that women should not be pastors or teachers. But certainly, if women have in fact been silenced by God, there should be no women pastors, teachers, missionaries, evangelists, etc. The basic argument on this issue stems from 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35:

"Women should remain silent in the churches: they are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the

church.” (NIV)

In his chapter, “Should Women Be Silent in the Church?” Charles Trombley raises several questions, the last of which he sees as of special importance to the proper interpretation of the passage: “Where and what is the law that underscores this restriction?”¹⁰

Trombley’s answer to that question concurs with reliable scholarship: “The expression ‘as also saith the law’ refers to the Oral Law of the Jews, now called the Talmud.” This was the very law to which Jesus referred when He said “You transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition.” (Matt. 15:3 NAS).

Convincingly, Trombley points out that it was the Judaizers with their “Oral Law” who wanted women silenced. Historically, since then, the actions of the church fathers are even more reprehensible since, as followers of Jesus, they should have known better. Furthermore, even in modern times there is little change for the better in the attitudes of church hierarchies (with some exceptions). Katherine Bushnell, medical doctor and Hebrew and Greek scholar, in her *God’s Word to Women*, written in the nineteenth century, shared insights which are needed now as much as ever, possibly more so:

At no point is faith in the entire Bible being so viciously and successfully attacked today as at the point of the “woman question,” and the church so far attempts no defense here of her children. It assumes that the interests of merely a few ambitious women are involved, whereas the very fundamentals of our faith are at stake.¹²

Briefly, for those who want to pursue further study with authors friendly to the idea of women’s speaking in the church, or even teaching, let us look at Paul’s advice to Timothy. “But I do not permit a woman to teach, or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.” (1 Tim. 2:12 NIV) Trombley argues that Paul cited Eve’s fate in the creation order to refute and reduce the influence of the Gnostic women in Ephesus, but that he did not intend thereby to forbid all women for all times the privilege of public preaching when males are present.¹² Trombley’s paraphrase of the passage, which should be read in the context of his entire chapter of scholarly discussion, is as follows: “Let a woman learn quietly, without interruptions and questions. Presently I’m not permitting a woman to teach anyone or exer-

cise her sexual wiles to control a man, but to be reverent and peaceful. Because Adam was formed first, and then Eve. And it wasn't Adam who was deceived — Eve was thoroughly deceived and became a transgressor. Nevertheless, woman shall be delivered from the condition that requires her silence; she may someday be restored and able to teach. This is possible because childbearing, by producing the seed who destroyed Satan's power, balances the superior position of man established in the creation order. However, women can only be restored as they walk in faith and love."¹³ He concludes, "Any idea that God could not or would not speak through a woman simply because she is female contradicts the whole New Testament teaching of Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul. No person, male or female, is called by God on the basis of sex, but on the basis of commitment to Him. In Christ there is neither male nor female."¹⁴

In approaching Scripture with regard to women's equality, four principles should be kept in mind: First, *all relevant scripture must be used*. Too long the church has looked only at those texts which suggest (on the surface at least) the inferiority of women, while neglecting to give equal cognizance to such female-friendly verses as passages that present the equality principle: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3: 28 NIV)

There is also the oft-neglected reciprocity principle (1 Cor. 7: 3-5 NIV): "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again, so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

A second principle is that *close attention must be paid to historical context*. In Trombley's discussion of 1 Cor. 14: 34-35 and 1 Tim. 2: 12, when special attention is given to the historical context, the real meaning of the text becomes clear. The inferior status of women in Palestine according to the Oral Law is a factor of great significance in helping to sort the positive from the negative impact for today.

A third principle which figures large in my judgment, on many im-

portant matters is that *what is universal and eternal must be distinguished from what is particular and timebound*. Theological principles must be taken seriously, but there are other pieces of advice which the church in general ignores quite happily. For example, the passage "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" (1 Tim. 5: 23) is ignored by teetotal churches. "Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss" (1 Thess. 5: 26) is not compelling today's Christian men to engage in regular demonstrations of obedience. Contrariwise, Paul's opinion that a woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head (1 Cor. 11: 5) is a verse which in some modern Christian communities is laid on women with such seriousness as to suggest that some great eternal principle is at stake.

Whatever may have been Paul's intention in his declaration of equality of personhood in Galatians 3: 23-29, on the level of practical application, he did not succeed in implementing all the terms of his own ideal: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In this passage, he presents three paired types of people who, under the law and sin, have unequal relationships, but now in Christ have equality of personhood. Paul demonstrated by his life and ministry that old distinctions between Jew and Gentile were no longer valid. Nevertheless, though in *principle* Paul was true to his teaching in a large part regarding slaves and free men, or between men and women, he failed to carry through successfully on the last two. He never challenged the system itself in these cases, as he did when equality between Jew and Greek was discussed.

Take the case of Onesimus the slave, for whom Paul pleads. Onesimus is no longer just a runaway slave but has become a "son," "a brother beloved," a person to be received by Philemon, the master, as though he were Paul himself. Although the guiding spirit in Paul's efforts was love, and we presume that the end result was Onesimus' freedom, Paul did not challenge the slavery system of his day. Today's church would not do less than stand against slavery, as trafficking in persons is seen to be a heinous crime. Perhaps, we in Christian churches should now note the parallel. Women generally have not yet experienced their full freedom which Jesus purchased at such

great cost. We have some catching up to do!

Finally, the fourth of our principles is that *Jesus Christ must be the starting point*. Passive irresponsibility on the part of women is as contrary to His will as prideful domination on the part of men. If we dare to call ourselves His disciples, we must not ignore His words and actions.¹⁵

Consider what happened on the day of Pentecost and the consequences as spelled out by Peter, who was quoting Joel, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy." (Acts 2: 17,18) "Yes, I will endue even my slaves, both men and women, with a portion of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy," says it even more clearly, and highlights God's gracious touch of mercy toward "all flesh."¹⁶ As someone said to me who came asking support for a leprosy mission overseas, "Jesus said, 'Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers.' He mentioned the lepers especially so we would not leave them out." The prophesying to which Peter (and Joel before him) referred was not only the foretelling of events such as the return of the Lord, but also the proclamation (preaching) to the world at large of the glad tidings of salvation through Jesus Christ. Can any of us imagine to what extent the communication of the gospel has been hindered by the prejudices and non-Biblical traditions of men that have prevented enormous numbers of highly motivated women from following the Spirit in preaching the good news?

God said, "Go!" Church leaders in all too many cases said, "No!" Women have been rendered powerless in the decision-making processes of church bodies, and speechless in the public services of their churches by those who are often manifesting, not a liberating anointed view of what the Holy Spirit is doing through men and women, but an unreasonable devotion to their own sex with contempt for the other sex. That male chauvinism should parade itself as something godly, cloaking itself in Bible verses with intent to silence half the human race is sad indeed.

When Dr. Paul Yongii Cho invited me to be the evangelist for the

Spring Crusade of the Seoul Full Gospel Church, he was excited to think of the encouragement to ministry his women would receive through the fact that I, the guest speaker, was a woman. "A woman brought me the gospel when I was dying. My mother-in-law is my co-pastor. Two-thirds of my cell group leaders are women, and I find them loyal and faithful servants of the Lord, and responsive to my leadership," said Pastor Cho. Then he told me of his own awakening to the generally neglected ministries of women in the church. "As I was in prayer, the Lord revealed to me the plan for establishing the cell group system, which contributed in a large part to the phenomenal growth of the Seoul Full Gospel Church. But I had difficulty getting our men to commit to the giving of so much time and energy to cell group leadership, since they had their own business affairs to care for." Then said Cho, the Lord spoke to me, "Use the women!" I said, "No, Lord, this is Korea! We have our customs. The people will not receive women as leaders!" But use women he did, and with what phenomenal success! The call of the Spirit prevailed over the established traditions and customs of the culture, and the established church.

Fortunately for me, from the beginning I was privileged to see what a woman can do in speaking the wonderful words of life, when the two women who preached in our country school house were instruments for my enlightenment. Then, another mercy: the believers who nurtured me in my Christian infancy also believed women may be called to preach. When I was a teenager in Kelowna at Evangel Tabernacle, seeking God with all my heart and evidently anointed with the Holy Spirit, the pastor's wife, Mrs. Catrano, said encouragingly, "I believe you are called to preach!" John Lindahl, an elder in the same church, pointed to the visiting evangelist Evelyn Olsen and said, "Some day you will preach just like Evelyn, and even better." At the time the possibility seemed to me very remote.

But not everyone has been so fortunate. "Pastor, I would like to get involved in ministry," said one of the finest Christians I know to her minister. What she wanted was to participate in the soul-winning activities of the church, share scripture and lead in prayer. What she got was an introduction to the leader of the women's group, and from her an assignment, "You may bring the pickles next week."

Said she, "I am so tired of being told I may bring the pickles." In my capacity as pastor I was in a position to enable her to find her place in one-to-one soul-winning and discipling, and in the ministry of visitation. My plea on behalf of such women is that the leaders take responsibility, as the Scripture says they should do, to enable not only the men but also the women to fulfill their calling before God. "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up...." (Ephesians 4: 11, 12 NIV)

Many women have sought my counsel as to how to find their way into fulltime Christian service. Of course, there is no one way. We do know however that before God women are equally responsible with men for their own life and service. My advice to earnest Christian women who feel they may be called to preach is first of all to work at serving your pastor and fellowship in a true spirit of submission, humility and sincerity. For what they have suffered at the hands of those who were their religious superiors, simply for being female, *multitudes* of women will at last receive special rewards for service, precisely because they took their frustrations and sufferings in a spirit of sweetness and grace for Jesus' sake.

Remember that if you have no burden for souls at home, you will not suddenly be transformed into a Catherine Booth merely by moving to another city, or going to college. If you have been to Bible College, and have a university degree besides, and still no openings, no pulpit opportunities, no chance to begin service on a pastoral team, you can either plant a church, or alternately seek a service opportunity with a parachurch organization (they serve missions and win souls also).

If you are persistently drawn to the preaching ministry, keep in mind that the same Holy Spirit who is calling you to ministry can also guide you into your proper place of service. Even Paul the apostle had to pray for doors to open, and rely upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The main thing is to keep your eyes on the Lord, and resist leaning on the arm of flesh which can only lead to disappointments, and, if you are not careful, to bitterness and rebellion. There is every indication in Scripture that increasingly, in the "last days"

when God pours out his Spirit on all flesh, young men and women will prophesy (preach). (Acts 2: 18).

In these days believing Christians are in many ways in a position comparable to that of Simeon and Anna, just and devout persons who were waiting for "the consolation" of Israel. To Simeon the Holy Spirit revealed that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah, the consolation of Israel (v 26). When Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms he exclaimed, "Now let your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared before the face of your people Israel." (Luke 2: 28-32).

Anna, a prophetess, a widow of 84 years of age, who served God with fasting and prayers day and night in the temple, arrived at the temple at just the right moment; on seeing Joseph and Mary, Jesus and Simeon together she also burst into praise, loudly proclaiming to those round about that looked for redemption that this child was the Messiah! Anyone, man or woman, could look for no greater ministry than to be in the Spirit at the right place, at just the right moment — to herald the coming of the King!

Notes

- 1 Judith Lushman, "Her Honour, Sir, Was Not a Person," *Weekend Magazine*, 14, 16 (date unknown).
- 2 Pauline Ashton, "Windy Nellie, The Canadian Woman's Best Friend," 18, *Weekend Magazine*, December 15, 1873.
- 3 Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We Are Meant To Be*, 12, Waco, TX: Word Books, 1974.
- 4 Catherine Booth, *Female Ministry: A Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel*, New York: The Salvation Army Supplies Printing and Publishing Department, 1975 (1859), 5.
- 5 Charles Trombley, *Who Said Women Can't Teach?*, Bridge: So. Plainfield, NJ, 1985, 74.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 19, 20.
- 7 Leonard Swidler, "Jesus Was a Feminist", *Catholic World*, January 1971, 178.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 179.
- 9 Trombley, *Ibid.*, 29.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 3.

- 11 Katherine C. Bushnell, *God's Word to Women* (1923) privately reprinted by Ray Munson, North Collins, NY.
- 12 Trombley, *Ibid.*, 179.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 184.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 185.
- 15 Lucille Sider Dayton, *The Feminist Movement and Scripture*, publisher unknown.
- 16 *New English Bible*.

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